

A man was racially harassed and assaulted shortly after midnight Saturday in Coeur d'Alene while walking home from the grocery store.

The man told police that he was walking along the 800 block of East Harrison Avenue when a big red truck passed him slowly. The occupants yelled obscenities and racial epithets. The man has a Hispanic name and his race is listed as black on the report filed by the Coeur d'Alene Police Department.

The truck stopped ahead of him, heading north on 9th Street, and three men got out and beat him, the man told police. They punched him in the face twice and kicked him in the back of the head, the report said.

The man described the vehicle as a "big red truck with big tires" and told police the word "BUTLER" was written across the tailgate. Richard Butler was the leader of the Aryan Nations until his death in 2004.

The incident was reported Sunday but not released to media until Wednesday. Police Sgt. Christie Wood, a spokeswoman, said officers have more time to complete reports "if there isn't a known suspect and someone didn't get arrested."

The incident is the latest in a series of racial harassments and assaults that have occurred in North Idaho and Spokane since spring. They have included the spray-painting of swastikas on cars, a noose left on the North Spokane doorstep of an African-American human rights activist, and beatings of Native American and African-American men. Racist literature also has been delivered to neighborhoods in North Idaho and Spokane.

"They're escalating. One thing we have learned over the years is when those things happen, they escalate, and they escalate into a series of crimes. It is so awful and it is so discouraging," said Tony Stewart of the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations. "With all our energy we condemn such atrocious behavior."

The man beaten on Saturday told police he was staying with his girlfriend and walked to the Safeway store on Fourth Street when he discovered they were out of milk. The store wasn't open, so he turned around. He was assaulted while walking back, the report said. He reported the incident Sunday morning around 11 a.m.

The man had fresh bruises above and below his eyes, a swollen lip and a "red mark" on the back of his head when a police officer met with him at Kootenai Medical Center's emergency room, the report said.

When the officer called back to clarify some points, the man "said that he was leaving today and not coming back and hung up. From the sounds of it," the officer wrote, "he didn't want to pursue this matter."